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AUTHOR Boyles, P.: And Others
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ABSTRACT

An ecosystems environmental assessment project was conducted in order to evaluate the residence hall environment at Indiana University, Bloomington campus. Students (N=637), representing a response rate of 67%, completed questionnaires during October 1979. Items about which most students expressed strong feelings, positive or negative, included statements about the quality of food, custodial care, quiet hours, and opportunity for study in their rooms. Overall results indicated a rather favorable perception on the part of students toward their environment. (Author/HLM)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESIDENCE HALL ENVIRONMENT AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY USING AN ECOSYSTEM MODEL

R.Boyles, R.Bumba, N.Lorenz, D.Murphy, J.Schuh

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The purpose of this report is to discuss an ecosystems environmental assessment project undertaken during the fall, 1979, which attempted to evaluate the residence hall environment at Indiana University, Bloomington. This project is part of an ongoing process by which the residence hall environment on the Bloomington campus is evaluated.

The rationale behind using the ecosystems method is that it provides a process by which students can be involved directly in designing their living environment. This particular method provides an opportunity for students to identify the problem areas of their environment, and provide suggestions and recommendations as to how the problems areas might be improved. The ecosystem method differs from other paper and pencil reports because the method provides for students to provide direct recommendations for change, whereas many other methods elicit feedback, but not recommendations for change.

An environmental assessment project was conducted during the latter part of the fall semester, 1978. At that time certain data were gathered which indicated that there were aspects of the student residential environment that needed attention. This paper will attempt to report not only the results of the 1979 project, but also compare and contrast the results of the 1979 project with those of the 1978 project.

Method

The sample selected for this project was drawn on a systematic basis. Each center, with the exception of MRC, drew a sample of 100 students. Due to the smaller size, MRC proportionally included 50 students in the sample. These students included in the sample were identified by use of a roster of student residents. Every tenth student was included in the sample, until 100 students were included in the sample for each center. While this method of drawing a sample was not random, it was considered to be reasonably representative, since each living unit had a minimum of one student included in the sample. According to Professor George Kuh of the Department of College Student Personnel, this method was appropriate for this type of research project.

The instrument used in this project was developed by the authors. It was based on the questionnaire used in the 1978 project. Representatives from RHA and the Halls of Residence department were invited to submit questions for inclusion in the questionnaire. They did so. A unique feature of this year's instrument was that individual residence centers had the opportunity to submit not more than five additional questions which examined issues of particular interest to the center. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

The data were collected by distributing the questionnaires to those included in the sample through resident assistants. All responses were anonymous. The students were asked to complete the instruments and return them to a designated place in the center. Most often this process was accomplished by having the instruments returned to the main desk. A follow-up collection was implemented in those centers where the response rate was

poor. In those instances additional questionnaires were distributed to those students who had indicated that they had not responded within a one-week period of time. All data were collected during October, 1979.

Russ Bumba and Dennis Murphy supervised the data analysis plan. They wrote SPSS computer programs which analyzed the data and yielded frequency distributions, means, modes, medians and histograms for each item on a center by center basis. Additionally, a system-wide analysis of data was undertaken. Further analysis of data using demographic variables such as sex, class standing, and whether or not the respondant had lived in the center the previous year was accomplished so that the responses of subgroups of students could be reported.

Results

Of the 950 students included in the sample, 637 responded, for a response of 67 percent. The class standing of the respondents is reported in Table 1. Following the general mix of students living in the residence halls, the largest group of respondents was freshmen, followed by sophomores, juniors and seniors.

Table 1

Class Standing of Respondents

Class Standing	Percentage of Respondents
Freshman	44.6%
Sophomore	27.3%
Junior	18.2%
Senior	8.2%
Graduate	.3%
No response	1.4%

More females completed more questionnaires than males which is consistent with the actual sexual population of the residence halls. However, it should be noted that more females live in the residence halls than males. These data are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Sex of Respondents

Sex	Percentage of Respondents
Female	52.4%
Male	45.2%
No response	2.4%

The other demographic variable asked whether or not the respondents had lived in their present residence center prior to the Fall, 1979, semester. More respondents indicated that they had not lived in their present center prior to the fall semester. These data are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Previous Experience Living in Present Residence Center

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	38.5%
No	59.5%
No Response	2.0%

Students completing the questionnaire responded on a seven point Likert-type scale as to whether or not they agreed with a series of statements about life in the residence halls. A summary of the number of responses on an item by item basis is presented in Table 4. By examining this table the reader will be able to determine tendencies for each item, and measure the distribution of responses for each item. It is clear that for some items the responses tend to be clustered together, indicating some unanimity of perception of the item on the part of the respondents. However, for other items, responses are bimodal, indicating differences of perceptions on the part of the respondents.

Mean scores were developed for each item. The researchers determined that a mean score of less than four indicated a negative response on the part of the respondents toward the item they were evaluating, while a score of more than four indicated a positive perception. Most items had mean scores of more than four. Those items with a mean of less than four included the items examining guest speaker programs, faculty contact, cultural activities, personal development activities, and food service quality. A complete summary of these data is listed in Table 5.

A feature of this year's study was to duplicate a number of items in this questionnaire from the 1978 questionnaire. For comparative purposes, 21 items were repeated in the 1979 survey. While the reader is cautioned to remember that there are a number of differences in this year's research methodology, it is interesting to note that students reacted less positively to two items and more positively to 19 items in the 1979 study as compared with the 1978 study. These data also are listed in Table 5.

After completing the forced choice portion of the questionnaire (Part I), the respondents were instructed to go back through the questionnaire and identify those five items about which they felt most strongly about, either positively or negatively, and write about them in Part II. Part II of the questionnaire allowed students to offer suggestions for restructuring their environment. The specific responses have been returned to each of the residence centers for analysis and change. In summary, those items about which students wrote most frequently included the quality of food, custodial care, quiet hours, and opportunity for study in the room.

Table 4

Raw Responses to Part I of the Instrument

	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	No Response
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	57	188	138	193	24	7	6	24
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall.).	118	198	146	74	53	25	19	4
3. Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	29	23	43	161	119	98	154	10
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	66	126	134	162	63	43	34	9
5. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	135	194	144	70	48	27	13	6
6. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	102	129	112	76	87	71	56	9
7. The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) in my center are available to meet my needs.	185	199	119	94	23	9	2	6
8. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	194	211	112	78	14	11	11	6
9. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	109	169	128	169	19	21	16	6
10. Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	74	92	96	115	96	69	87	8
11. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	41	69	76	246	73	53	72	7

Table 4 Con't.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	No Response
12. I know the rules of my residence center.	146	231	142	76	21	7	8	6
13. The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	42	76	105	192	92	63	60	7
14. I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	143	97	102	180	40	44	20	14
15. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	260	201	106	26	12	14	12	6
16. There are adequate opportunities for social activities on my center.	123	164	153	105	39	27	19	7
17. The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	86	154	155	160	38	18	15	11
18. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	307	144	82	27	29	18	19	11
19. I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	107	196	138	101	43	30	14	8
20. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	165	200	106	68	41	30	20	7
21. The general attitude of the staff employed in the food service department is courteous and helpful.	96	145	145	84	65	51	44	7
22. I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	98	209	161	104	35	14	7	9
23. I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This helps prevent non-residents from causing increased food costs which are reflected in the board rate. This does not rule out second servings for residents or paying guests.	180	113	71	100	35	58	69	11
24. I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	36	70	87	172	105	97	59	11
25. I am satisfied with the quality of food preparation in my residence center.	21	23	98	89	116	101	141	8
26. When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation	54	103	185	142	51	36	17	9

Table 5

Mean Scores for the 1978
and 1979 Instruments

		$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979
1.	The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	*	5.03
2.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall.).	4.92	5.16
3.	Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	2.30	3.04
4.	The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	4.59	4.52
5.	The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	6.02	5.26
6.	I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	4.20	4.46
7.	The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) in my center are available to meet my needs.	5.19	5.62
8.	I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	5.33	5.66
9.	Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	4.32	5.08
10.	Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	3.86	4.01
11.	I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	3.41	3.90

*=Did not appear in 1978 questionnaire
7=Very Strongly Agree; 1 =Very Strongly Disagree

Table 5 Con't.

		$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979
12.	I know the rules of my residence center.	5.19	5.56
13.	The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	3.68	3.98
14.	I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	4.40	4.87
15.	I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	*	5.92
16.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities on my center.	4.81	5.11
17.	The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	4.68	4.96
18.	The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	5.51	5.87
19.	I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	4.71	5.12
20.	I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	5.30	5.33
21.	The general attitude of the staff employed in the food service department is courteous and helpful.	4.22	4.67
22.	I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	*	5.26
23.	I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This helps prevent non-residents from causing increased food costs which are reflected in the board rate. This does not rule out second servings for residents or paying guests.	4.36	4.77
24.	I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	*	3.76
25.	I am satisfied with the quality of food preparation in my residence center.	2.68	3.28
26.	When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	*	4.54

*=Did not appear in 1978 questionnaire
7=Very Strongly Agree; 1=Very Strongly Disagree

Students wrote least frequently about printed information describing the residence center, knowing the rules of the center and of Indiana University, and knowledge of methods of solving problems in the center. These responses are listed in Table 6.

Summary

This paper has reported the results of the 1979 ecosystems study of the residence hall environment at Indiana University. The purpose of the study was to provide a method by which students could report perceptions of their environment, and provide suggestions for improving that environment. Data were collected during Fall, 1979, and work has begun in the various residence centers to improve the living environment based upon the response data.

The results indicated a rather favorable perception on the part of students toward their environment. While they reported several negative perceptions of their environment, their basic responses were quite positive. When compared with a similar study which examined the environment in Fall, 1978, a number of improvements in perceptions were indicated. However, the reader is cautioned to note that the sampling technique employed in the 1979 study was different than that used in the 1978 survey. Additionally, there were other differences in the research process, including the timing of the survey, the percentage of response, and the optional items (which were not reported in this paper) that individual centers prepared.

If the quality of life in the residential centers at Indiana University is to improve, changes will need to made in the individual centers as well as in the system as a whole. Reports, such as this one, provide some direction for those changes. Each residence life coordinator has indicated that action plans will be undertaken in the centers in their areas of responsibility. They report that this process has been a useful one for them, and they look forward to participating in another ecosystem survey during the Fall of 1980.

Table 6

Number of Written Responses
to Part II of the Instrument

		Number of Written Responses
1.	The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	20
2.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall.).	50
3.	Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	87
4.	The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	47
5.	The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	54
6.	I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	115
7.	The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) in my center are available to meet my needs.	73
8.	I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	50
9.	Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	35
10.	Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	124
11.	I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	44

Table 6 Con't.

		Number of Written Responses
12.	I know the rules of my residence center.	11
13.	The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	29
14.	I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	47
15.	I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	75
16.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities on my center.	27
17.	The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	22
18.	The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	164
19.	I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	13
20.	I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	67
21.	The general attitude of the staff employed in the food service department is courteous and helpful.	54
22.	I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	8
23.	I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This helps prevent non-residents from causing increased food costs which are reflected in the board rate. This does not rule out second servings for residents or paying guests.	100
24.	I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	22
25.	I am satisfied with the quality of food preparation in my residence center.	216
26.	When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	13

Appendix A

DEPARTMENT OF RESIDENCE LIFE

Indiana University

October 8, 1979

Dear Resident Student,

One of the objectives I have is to make living in the residence halls be a rewarding experience for students. Students should have a regular opportunity to provide information to organizations such as the Community Councils and the staff assigned to the various centers on how they perceive life in the center.

With that in mind, you have been selected as one of approximately 10% of the residential population to complete the attached questionnaire. It should not take more than 20 minutes to do so. The information you provide will be extremely useful in modifying the environment in which you live to make it a better place in which to live.

I want to assure you that all responses will be anonymous. Let me thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

John H. Schuh, Director
Department of Residence Life

Please answer the following three questions by placing an X in the blank space that represents the best answer to the question, and then go on to the next page:

Please indicate your class standing:
Freshman ____
Sophomore ____
Junior ____
Senior ____

Please indicate your sex:
Female ____
Male ____

Please indicate that prior to the Fall, 1979, semester, if you have lived in your present residence center:
Yes ____
No ____

PART I

Listed below are a series of statements. Please read them, and on the continuum to the right of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it by placing an X in the appropriate blank.

The following definition of terms may be useful to you:

Resident Assistant (Resident Fellow): This person is an upperclass or graduate student who is assigned to a floor or hall and is responsible for interpersonal, social and academic experiences of students.

Residence Life Staff: Includes Resident Assistants (Resident Fellows) and Residence Life Coordinators.

Halls of Residence Staff: Includes the Housing Manager, maintenance and custodial personnel, and clerical staff.

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall.).	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
3. Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
5. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
6. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
7. The resident assistants (resident fellows in MRC) in my center are available to meet my needs.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
8. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
9. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
10. Established quiet hours help create an atmosphere which supports my efforts to study in my room.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
11. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/

		(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
12.	I know the rules of my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
13.	The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
14.	I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
15.	I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
16.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities on my center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
17.	The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
18.	The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
19.	I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
20.	I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
21.	The general attitude of the staff employed in the food service department is courteous and helpful.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
22.	I know the rules and regulations of I.U.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
23.	I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This helps prevent non-residents from causing increased food costs which are reflected in the board rate. This does not rule out second servings for residents or paying guests.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
24.	I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership training being offered in my center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
25.	I am satisfied with the quality of food preparation in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
26.	When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/

PART II

Now that you have completed Part I, go back through the items and identify not more than five items that you feel very strongly about, in either a positive or negative sense. Write the number of those items in the blocks provided below. Then, next to the item number, write why you feel strongly about the item, and what you would recommend to improve the situation.

Item Number	WHY DO YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT THE ITEM	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

Thank you for your help with this project.